



Combined Fire Authority

16 February 2022

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Update

Report of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the current position and next steps of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

Background

2. In July 2017, HMICFRS extended its remit to include inspections of England's 45 FRS as well as the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales.
3. The standard FRS inspection programme assesses how effectively and efficiently FRS prevents, protects the public against and responds to fires and other emergencies. It also assesses how well services look after their people who work for the Service.
4. The first HMICFRS inspection of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) was completed on 19 July 2019 with the final report published on 17 December 2019.
5. Additionally, in August 2020, HMICFRS were commissioned to inspect the response to the COVID-19 pandemic of the fire and rescue sector in England. CDDFRS was inspected the week beginning 2 November 2020 with the inspection conducted entirely virtually, with interviews using Microsoft Teams.

CDDFRS Round 2 Inspection

6. CDDFRS's second inspection is part of tranche 3 of HMICFRS's Round 2 inspections. The document and self-assessment requests were issued to the Service on 10 January 2022 with these being submitted on 7 February 2022.
7. The programmed dates for the main part of the inspection are the six weeks beginning on 30 May 2022. This will consist of an initial Strategic Brief to Andy Cooke, our regional HMI followed by intensive scrutiny of our effectiveness, efficiency and people.

State of Fire and Rescue 2021

8. Under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, Sir Thomas Winsor is required to publish an annual assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of FRS in England.

9. On 15 December 2021, the 'State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2021' was published. This is his third and final assessment of England's FRS before leaving his post in March 2022.
10. The report can be accessed online at: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/state-fire-rescue-annual-assessment-2021/> and is in three parts:
 - Part 1 contains his assessment of the state of FRS in England;
 - Part 2 gives an overview of the gradings and the findings from HMICFRS's first 13 inspections of their Round 2 inspections of FRS's in England;
 - Part 3 sets out the full list of HMICFRS fire and rescue reports and other inspection publications for the period covered by the report.
11. The key headlines outlined in Part 1 of the report are listed below:
 - Progress has been made in some areas but more change is urgently required;
 - Many services have done more to prioritise fire protection;
 - Too many services aren't taking enough action on prevention;
 - Most services we inspected are better at promoting a positive professional culture;
 - Inconsistent funding and governance arrangements persist;
 - Some services don't allocate resources appropriately;
 - Many services rely on dual contracts and overtime, which can create inefficiencies;
 - Good intentions to promote equality, diversity and inclusion aren't always successful;
 - Diversity and race equality in the fire sector continues to be woeful;
 - The FRS continues to be an enormous asset to our communities;
 - HMICFRS national recommendations need to be brought in faster;
 - The windspeed of national reform has dropped;
 - The continued threat of industrial action doesn't help anyone, least of all the public;
 - The current pay structure does not give experienced firefighters a sufficient financial incentive to stay in their roles;
 - Insufficient action to develop prospective future Chief Fire Officers;
 - Welcome the focus of the Government and the sector on fire and building safety.
12. There are no new recommendations made, with Sir Thomas Winsor stating the sector must continue to act on the recommendations he has already made, and at a more urgent pace.
13. The Service have reviewed the content of the report and are using it to assist the planning for the forthcoming inspection.

Senior HMI Staff

14. HMI Zoë Billingham was the Inspectorate's senior lead for the fire and rescue inspection programme since its inception, she left her role in the inspectorate in September 2021. Zoë's successor is HMI Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM, who was the first chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC).
15. Laura Gibb, the FRS portfolio director left HMICFRS at the end of 2021 to take up a new role as Secretary to the Angiolini inquiry (police conduct and vetting following the murder of Sarah Everard). Her successor is Alex Hill who previously covered for Laura Gibb while she was on maternity leave in 2019.

Fire and Rescue Service Monitoring Arrangements

16. HMI Roy Wilsher updated all FRS in December 2021 of a new Monitoring Portal to be introduced in 2022. This will involve closer engagement with Services to ensure they are taking the necessary remedial action where HMICFRS have identified problems. The process will apply to every FRS in England. Although the monitoring activity will primarily be focused on Services who have a cause(s) of concern, the portal will also include Areas for Improvement identified during an inspection.
17. A cause of concern is a serious, critical or systemic shortcoming in a FRS practice, policy or performance. A cause of concern is always accompanied by one or more recommendations. If a Service has been identified as having a cause of concern, then the graded judgment that they can achieve for that question will be no higher than 'requires improvement'.
18. A Service will be made formally aware of their cause(s) of concern at the earliest opportunity by HMICFRS. This will allow the Service to take immediate action to address the cause(s) of concern, prior to receiving their inspection report. The Service will be required to produce an action plan to outline how they will address the cause of concern. In discussions with the regional HMI, a tailored approach will be agreed, which may include a revisit.
19. The Service Liaison Officer (SLO) will be responsible for providing a quarterly update to the HMICFRS's Service Liaison Lead (SLL) on progress against recommendations. HMICFRS could decide to increase monitoring and formally engage with a Service more closely, if a Service is failing, or is likely to fail, to respond adequately and promptly in respect of a cause of concern.
20. Once the SLL is satisfied that there is substantial evidence that a recommendation has been completed by the Service, they will update the monitoring portal. The SLL will discuss this with their respective chief of staff, and it is the responsibility of the chief of staff to be satisfied with the evidence, and to make a recommendation to the HMI that the cause of concern is now officially closed.
21. Once all recommendations associated with a cause of concern have been signed off as complete by the HMI, the regional HMI will send a letter to the Chief Fire Officer and Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority informing them that the cause of concern is now officially closed.
22. An area for improvement is an aspect of practice, policy or performance which falls short of the necessary level of quality, but which is not a serious or critical shortcoming. Areas for improvement will not usually be accompanied by a recommendation. A Service can be graded no higher than "good" for a question where an area for improvement has been found. HMICFRS will formally review what progress a Service has made against an area for improvement during their scheduled inspection (as per the FRS inspection programme).

Recommendations

23. Members are requested to:
 - a. **note** the contents of this report;
 - b. **receive** further reports as appropriate.